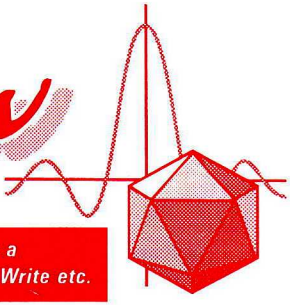
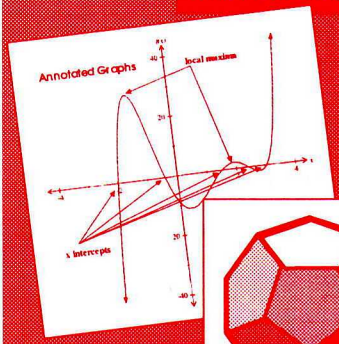
RM User

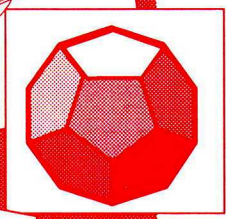
Volume 14:2
December 1999

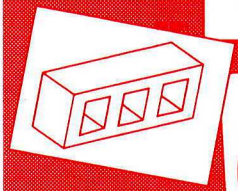
FX Draw

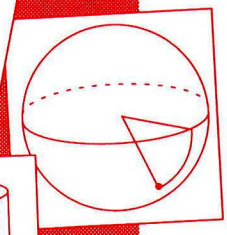


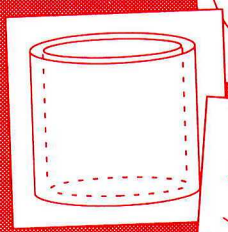
Available for IBM (Windows 3.1 or later) Requires a Windows word processor, eg MS Word, Windows Write etc.

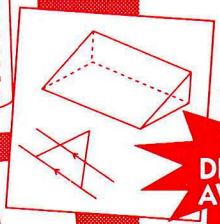


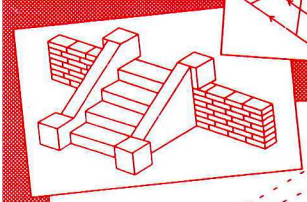


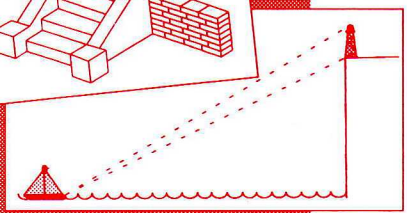












FX Draw is a drawing package designed for mathematics. You can draw almost any required mathematical diagram with a minimum amount of input from yourself.

There are tools for drawing angles, graphs, normal distribution curves, Venn diagrams, right-angled triangles and a host more. FX Draw is an OLE object, and fits seamlessly into any Windows word processor, such as Microsoft Word. Your diagrams will be inserted into your document and appear on your screen as they will appear when printed. The diagrams can be moved, resized and edited from within your document.

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Deadlines for the next issues

RM User 14.3 ..... 20 April 2000
RM User 14.4 ..... 20 June 2000

The date shown above is the ***latest*** date for copy for the magazine. You will normally receive the magazine about 2-3 weeks after the date shown.

Missing a Magazine?

Back issues of the magazine are available from the editor - please contact me for more details.

Website

Through the kind assistance of Tim Clark, we continue to have the use of the URL www.rmug.org.uk. Diana Rolf has been helping to re-organise the site and I am sure she (and/or I) will be grateful for any feedback. There is a list of phone numbers of the suppliers who have been reviewed in the past, contents pages and a few articles from past magazines. There are also several resources donated by presenters at the Training Weekend and there are two areas where you can post comments about either RM related matters or curriculum related matters. There may be further new areas developed - **if** you ask for them!!

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Advertising in the Magazine

Full and half page advertisements can be placed in the magazine and details can be obtained from the Advertising Manager. We also take classified ads and members may place free ads for surplus equipment in MicroMart.

Rates

Back Cover **£60** Inside Cover **£50** Full Page **£30** Half Page **£20**

These rates assume black-on-white, camera ready copy. Please avoid dot-matrix output. Typesetting is charged at cost and is additional to the above rates. Please make cheques payable to *RM User Group*

News & Editorial

CONNECTED?

How connected are you? Have you connected your Windows CE machine to your NT network yet? If yes, be very afraid. Apparently it will now carry your NT password, carefully encrypted by mingling the letter of the word Pegasus, backwards, with it. I am also concerned by the constant stream of email warnings from Microsoft: do sign up for this service - concerning bug fixes for IE4 and 5 and for IIS.

READY FOR FUN?

Watch out for fun.love - a virus that creates a file called FCLSS.EXE which sits in the system dir and spreads the virus. Once an admin has used the station then successive users will all have admin rights . . . and then there's Bubbleboy!

OOPS

I know you think I'm an awful editor but my typos pale into insignificance compared with the performance of the editor of the online magazine Privacy Place - dedicated to internet anonymity. He emailed the first edition to all his members - and inadvertently included everyone else's addresses . . .

CHALKFACE

Chalkface have sent me a set of worksheets entitled "Assessing and Reporting ICT in Core subjects" They are well laid out and seek to offer subject-oriented work in five subject areas: I am not sure how the worksheets meet the target of assessing. I **am** impressed with the professional layout of the 36 sheets (which can be photocopied) and with some of the starter ideas - but, and this is a very personal view, I would really refer to have these kind of resources in an electronic format which I could customise before using. Even better, I would like them as a set of webpages which I could set up on our intranet and deliver when needed. I got a mailshot the other day from a company which said they were offering tools which would facilitate quick creation of subject- based web pages - and make it easy to create online testing. I rang them immediately - only to discover that it was all still in the pipeline. I suppose it might have been worse. I heard a story about someone calling a company that went like this:- "Hello, can I speak to Mr P——?" "Which Mr P—— would you like to speak to?" "How many Mr P——'s have you got?" "Just the one" "Well, that will be the one I want" "OK, you're speaking to him." On the subject of assessing ICT delivery, the TTA have produced a HUGE set of resources. I am not quite sure what the status of these are (they consist of 3 CDROMs and several folders) - I was at a conference where one delegate asked Anthea Millett whether they had had permission to distribute them - but I eventually got mine from their website. I did have a hiccough because when I filled in the form and clicked on the grovel button - sorry, the

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submit button; I got an error message. This often happens to me and (like a few other experiences) I do wonder how often it happens to other people.

IT'S GOOD TO TALK

I have been trying out the BT Easicom 1000 phone. It has a screen and allows you to manage up to 5 email accounts and also use a growing number of online shopping outlets. There is a keyboard which slides out from under the unit. It also uses CLI technology to store a list of all incoming and outgoing calls so you can quickly see what you have missed when you were out (even those folk who didn't leave a message) There are two indicator lights on top - a red one that indicates that there has been an incoming call and a green one that shows that you have email to collect. This is where it starts to get a bit weird - the red light comes on even if you have answered the call. I don't understand this. Surely we only need to know if there was a call while we were out. I am going to send it back because although we love the CLI information the email service is not as handy as I thought it would be. They had claimed that you could set it up to check other existing POP3 accounts. It turns out that this is only true if your POP3 is with one of a (fairly short) list of ISPs. I think I will wait for the Easicom 2000 and hope that it uses a touch screen and that they 'fix' the warning lights.

MEA CULPA

This - in case you haven't noticed - is the **latest** issue ever produced! I have often just missed the end of term but usually only just. This time I just didn't have enough to print and instead of filling it up with chaff, since it may be the last issue I waited! I hope you will agree that it was worth it? I say 'may' with a little hesitation because I have been talking to the folk at Schoolmaster.net and there is a possibility that they may sponsor at least one further issue. I have found the talks fascinating because we have been talking in the committee about redefining the User Group and one suggestion was that since we no longer concentrate on technical RM-specific content we should actually change the name of the group. I am hesitant about this although I was impressed with a suggestion from one of our newest committee members that we should go for EPiC as in Educational PC Users. Schoolmaster.net are the latest in a number of attempts by different parties to create an interface for schools online. I actually opened the talks with them because of our decision to move further onto the web and cease the magazine. I felt that their community areas might suit us. They immediately agreed to set up an area for us - BUT should we set it up as RMUG or with a new name?? Your input would really help us here!! Please do have a look at their community model. You could start at www.ackworthschool.biblio.net to see what it looks like and with a bit of judicious clicking you should be able to navigate to their sample pages. They offer calendar functions online (one of the things that attracted me for the school) which could include things like a minibus calendar which only gets published to staff. Just think - you are planning a trip and can now check if it is available online (possibly from home) and book it! There are also email and chat areas - which are monitored - and a couple of online magazines. I have been to a couple of demos recently of ASP - not Active Server Pages but the delivery of

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applications across the internet. This technology is becoming very usable and I suspect that Schoolmaster may move that way too. So students and staff could log on to their school area from school or home or anywhere and pick up work and complete it online.

WHY?

Why can't they all use the same sort of power supply? A friend recently wanted to charge her mobile phone and was horrified by the pile of power supplies by my chair. There are two for phones, two for Psions - and so it goes on - why aren't they standardised? And why can't I charge the phone when the hands-free kit is connected? Unplugging the hands-free kit every couple of days is resulting in its connection getting worse! I have also never understood why they have to rip up old roads, take the bits away and bring in new stuff. Why not have one machine that will lift the old surface, pulverise it, mix it with hot tar and re-lay it? And while I'm on the subject - why don't we have different nozzles for petrol & diesel? If one was round and the other oval, with a little care in design neither would be able to enter the wrong tank.

For Sale & Wanted

FOR SALE

PC – 486DX2, 66 Mhz
Without Monitor
Excellent condition (serviced in July 1999)
Hard drive, floppy drive, Windows for Workgroups Version 3.11
Extras: spare CD-ROM drive, spare IBM floppy drive and cable, Trust Hand Scanner (b/w), 3½" disks containing DOS 6.22 and Windows for Workgroups Version 3.11, Wordstar for Windows (unopened). **£50 ono**

Powerquest's 'Drive Copy' Version 1(new) The easiest way to copy your old drive to your new drive **£15**

GISELA LEGG
E-mail:
glegg@piddington.screaming.net

RE: MS Access 97

Hi,

I want to send a Fax from within Access using WinFax Pro. I can generate the fax document, in MS Word, and print it to the fax print driver. However, what I don't know how to do is pass the telephone number to the fax driver so that you are not even requested to enter the number. Any ideas from your club's members would be appreciated.

In anticipation of a successful outcome,
Many Thanks.

TONY SETTLE
tony@masettle.screaming.net

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Tech Support Diary!

A Week in the Life of the Notes Support Person from Hell

Monday, 8:05am
User called to say they forgot password. Told them to use password retrieval utility called FDISK. Blissfully ignorant, they thank me and hang up. God, we let the people vote and drive, too?
8:12am
Accounting called to say they couldn't access expense reports database. Gave them Standard Sys Admin Answer #112, "Well, it works for me." Let them rant and rave while I unplugged my coffeemaker from the UPS and plugged their server back in. Suggested they try it again. One more happy customer...
8:14 am
User from 8:05 call said they received error message "Error accessing Drive 0." Told them it was an OS problem. Transferred them to microsupport.
11:00 am
Relatively quiet for last few hours. Decide to plug support phone back in so I can call my girlfriend. Says parents are coming into town this weekend. Put her on hold and transferred her to janitorial closet down in basement. What is she thinking? The "Myst" and "Doom" nationals are this weekend!
11:34 am
Another user calls (do they ever learn?). Says they want ACL changed on HR performance review database so that nobody but HR can access database. Tell them no problem. Hang up. Change ACL. Add @MailSend so performance reviews are sent to */US.
12:00 pm, Lunch
3:30 pm, Return from lunch.
3:55 pm
Wake up from nap. Bad dream makes me cranky. Bounce servers for no reason. Return to napping.
4:23 pm
Yet another user calls. Wants to know how to change fonts on form. Ask them what chip set they're using. Tell them to call back when they find out.
4:55 pm
Decide to run "Create Save/Replication Conflicts" macro so next shift has something to do.

Tuesday, 8:30 am
Finish reading support log from last night. Sounded busy. Terrible time with Save/Replication conflicts.
9:00 am
Support manager arrives. Wants to discuss my attitude. Click on PhoneNotes SmartIcon. "Love to, but kinda busy. Put something in the calendar database!" I yell as I grab for the support lines, which have (mysteriously) lit up. Walks away grumbling.
9:35 pm
Team leader from R&D needs ID for new employee. Tell them they need form J-19Ro9\\DARR\K1. Say they never heard of such a form. Tell them it's in the SPECIAL FORMS database. Say they never heard of such a database. Transfer them to janitorial closet in basement.

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10:00 am
Perky sounding intern from R&D calls and says she needs new ID. Tell her I need employee number, department name, manager name, and marital status. Run @DbLookup against state parole board database, Centers for Disease Control database, and my Oprah Winfrey database. No hits. Tell her ID will be ready tonight. Drawing from the lessons learned in last week's "Reengineering for Customer Partnership," I offer to personally deliver ID to her apartment.
10:07 am
Janitor stops by to say he keeps getting strange calls in basement. Offer to train him on Notes. Begin now. Let him watch console while I grab a smoke.
1:00 pm
Return from smoking break. Janitor says phones kept ringing, so he transferred them to cafeteria lady. I like this guy.
1:05 pm
Big commotion! Support manager falls in hole left where I pulled floor tiles outside his office door. Stress to him importance of not running in computer room, even if I do yell "Omigod-Fire!"
1:15 pm
Development Standards Committee calls and complains about umlauts in form names. Apologizing for the inconvenience, I tell them I will fix it. Hang up and run global search/replace using gaks.
1:20 pm
Mary Hairnet from cafeteria calls. Says she keeps getting calls for "Notice Loads" or "NoLoad Goats," she's not sure, couldn't hear over industrial-grade blender. Tell her it was probably "Lettuce Nodes." Maybe the food distributor with a new product? She thinks about it and hangs up.
2:00 pm
Legal secretary calls and says she lost password. Ask her to check in her purse, floor of car, and on bathroom counter. Tell her it probably fell out of back of machine. Suggest she put duct tape over all the airvents she can find on the PC. Grudgingly offer to create new ID for her while she does that.
2:49 pm
Janitor comes back. Wants more lessons. I take off rest of day.
Wednesday, 8:30 am
Irate user calls to say chipset has nothing to do with fonts on form. Tell them Of course, they should have been checking "Bitset," not "chipset." Sheepish user apologizes and hangs up.
9:10am
Support manager, with foot in cast, returns to office. Schedules 10:00am meeting with me. User calls and wants to talk to support manager about terrible help at support desk. Tell them manager about to go into meeting. Sometimes life hands you material . . .
10:00 am
Call Louie in janitorial services to cover for me. Go to support manager's office. He says he can't dismiss me but can suggest several lateral career moves. Most involve farm implements in third-world countries with moderate to heavy political turmoil. By and by, I ask if he's aware of new bug which takes full-text indexed random e-mail databases and puts all references to furry handcuffs and Bambi Boomer in Marketing on the corporate Web page. Meeting is adjourned as he reaches for keyboard, Web browser, and Tums.

10:30 am
Tell Louie he's doing great job. Offer to show him mainframe corporate PBX system sometime.
11:00 am, Lunch.
4:55 pm Return from lunch.
5:00 pm
Shift change; Going home.

Thursday, 8:00 am
New guy ("Marvin") started today. "Nice plaids" I offer. Show him server room, wiring closet, and technical library. Set him up with IBM PC-XT. Tell him to quit whining, Notes runs the same in both monochrome and color.
8:45 am
New guy's PC finishes booting up. Tell him I'll create new ID for him. Set minimum password length to 64. Go grab smoke.
9:30 am
Introduce Louie the custodian to Marvin. "Nice plaids" Louie comments. Is this guy great or what?!
11:00 am
Beat Louie in dominos game. Louie leaves. Fish spare dominos out of sleeves ("Always have backups"). User calls, says Accounting server is down. Untie Ethernet cable from radio antenna (better reception) and plug back into hub. Tell user to try again. Another happy customer!
11:55 am
Brief Marvin on Corporate Policy 98.022.01: "Whereas all new employee beginning on days ending in 'Y' shall enjoy all proper aspects with said corporation, said employee is obligated to provide sustenance and relief to senior technical analyst on shift." Marvin doubts. I point to "Corporate Policy" database (a fine piece of work, if I say so myself!). "Remember, that's DOUBLE pepperoni and NO peppers!" I yell to Marvin as he steps over open floor tile to get to exit door.
1:00 pm
Oooooh! Pizza makes me so sleepy...
4:30 pm
Wake from refreshing nap. Catch Marvin scanning want ads.
5:00 pm
Shift change. Flick HR's server off and on several times (just testing the On/Off button...). See ya tomorrow.

Friday, 8:00 am
Night shift still trying to replace power supply in HR server. Told them it worked fine before I left.
9:00 am
Marvin still not here. Decide I might start answering these calls myself. Unforward phones from Mailroom.
9:02 am
Yep. A user call. Users in Des Moines can't replicate. Me and the Oiuji board determine it's sunspots. Tell them to call Telecommunications.
9:30 am
Good God, another user! They're like ants. Says he's in San Diego and can't replicate with Des Moines. Tell him it's sunspots, but with a two-hour difference. Suggest he reset the time on the server back two hours.
10:17 am
Pensacola calls. Says they can't route mail to San Diego. Tell them to set server ahead three hours.
11:00 am
E-mail from corporate says for everybody to quit resetting the time on their servers.

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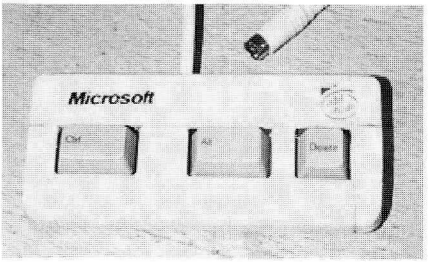
I change the date stamp and forward it to Milwaukee.
11:20 am
Finish @CoffeeMake macro. Put phone back on hook.
11:23 am
Milwaukee calls, asks what day it is.
11:25 am
Support manager stops by to say Marvin called in to quit. "So hard to get good help..." I respond. Support manager says he has appointment with orthopedic doctor this afternoon, and asks if I mind sitting in on the weekly department head meeting for him. "No problem!"
11:30 am
Call Louie and tell him opportunity knocks and he's invited to a meeting this afternoon. "Yeah, sure. You can bring your snuff" I tell him.
12:00 am, Lunch.
1:00 pm
Start full backups on UNIX server. Route them to device NULL to make them fast.
1:03 pm
Full weekly backups done. Man, I love modern technology!
2:30 pm
Look in support manager's contact management database. Cancel 2:45pm appointment for him. He really should be at home resting, you know.
2:39 pm
New user calls. Says want to learn how to create a connection document. Tell them to run connection document utility CTRL-ALT-DEL. Says PC rebooted. Tell them to call microsupport.
2:50 pm
Support manager calls to say mixup at doctor's office means appointment cancelled. Says he's just going to go on home. Ask him if he's seen corporate Web page lately.
3:00 pm
Another (novice) user calls. Says periodic macro not working. Suggest they place @DeleteDocument at end of formula. Promise to send them document addendum which says so.
4:00 pm
Finish changing foreground color in all documents to white. Also set point size to "2" in help databases.
4:30 pm
User calls to say they can't see anything in documents. Tell them to go to view, do a "Edit-Select All", hit delete key, and then refresh. Promise to send them document addendum which says so.
4:45 pm
Another user calls. Says they can't read help documents. Tell them I'll fix it. Hang up. Change font to Wingdings.
4:58 pm
Plug coffee maker into Ethernet hub to see what happens. Not (too) much.
5:00 pm
Night shift shows up. Tell that the hub is acting funny and to have a good weekend.



Microsoft New Keyboard

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Analysis of Evaluation Questionnaires

Delegates assessed each item on the following 5 point scale.

- only 35 questionnaires were returned
- **some scores are based on very low numbers of completed questionnaires.**

	Number of respondents	**Score** (Max = 5)	Score (Max = 5)
		Before the weekend	After the weekend
Administration	32	4.7	4.7
Venues		**School**	**Hotel**
Ease of access	35	3.1	4.6
Accommodation	33	4.2	4.9
Food	35	4.1	4.9
Training Sessions		**Presentation**	**Overall usefulness**
Saturday Morning			
Databases	14	4.9	4.3
Web Authoring	10	4.4	4.4
Word 6		4.2	4.5
Powerpoint	1	5.0	5.0
Internet Access	2	3.5	4.0
Proxy Server	3	3.7	3.7
Laptops in Schools	2	3.5	4.5
Sunday Morning			
Publisher	14	4.4	4.7
Excel	10	4.1	3.4
Datalogging	6	4.0	3.8
Internet Access	3	2.7	3.3
CAD/CAM	1	5.0	5.0
Sunday Afternoon			
Powerpoint	9	5.0	4.8
Design Web Site	12	3.8	4.1
Word	3	5.0	5.0
Lego Robotics	5	4.6	4.7
Internet Access	3	4.0	3.7
Successmaker	1	4.0	4.0

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Thoughts of Chairman How

I've been taxing my poor head for something to say as it is the start of a new millennium and the end of the old . . . There are only two things that come easily to mind and reflect my current state of play in computing. I've been lucky enough to be involved in a couple of Primary School development strategies for the new millennium. Both schools are larger than average for primary schools with 300 pupils. They have different ways of tackling IT and I've no doubt which works best - more of that later.

School 1 - has a standalone computer in every classroom as well as what they call an IT suite with sixteen computers, which in theory everyone is able to use, but is in fact used in a rather unstructured way.

The school has access to the internet on one machine in the staff-room. This machine can be accessed by small groups of pupils with the supervision of a teacher. One of the nice experiences for pupils in school is provided by the IT Co-ordinator who has established a link to a school in Australia via Travel-buddies, details of which (and a lot more), are found on the Australian site - www.bc.org.au. There are various projects for all ages, including primary, involving links with schools around the world not just Australia, e.g. the Montage Project in which schools in South Wales are pairing with schools in New South Wales to discuss citizenship etc. (Glyn to Gulong). Being a school in Wales, they have their ubiquitous rugby team (rather a good one) and are in the throes of sending match updates to www.rugbymail.co.uk . They used the Tesco Net Project for a while but gave up on it as it took a long time for their work to be posted on the site and much of it was only accessible to password holders. It's now a feature of our millennium dome!

The IT "suite" comes in useful for direct teaching sessions - it's not an affluent area and many pupils have few IT skills, having little experience of computers at home. The teacher can introduce an aspect of a program and after initial input pupils can practise this in pairs (most classes being around 30 pupils). Now on to the equipment . . .

Like most schools, they cannot afford decent IT equipment so they 'make-do-and-mend' with mostly second hand machines discarded by local industry - 486s and a couple of Pentiums. These machines are strung together with coax cable (thin Ethernet). They run Windows 3.11 and use primarily Write-Away and Information Workshop (from Black Cat). These systems are obviously incredibly slow but because they've chosen not to put sophisticated software on them they are at least bearable. The single machines in each classroom are similar (RM Window Box 3.11s) but with a wider range of software and CDROM drives. The next investment for the school is £1,000 for a Windows NT Server. They are going to use this to provide internet access to all the machines in the school. This needs a 24 port hub in the computer suite (£160), plus network points for standalone machines (£45 per point), and a network card in each existing standalone machine (10/100 at £25 each) - Total cost to school! therefore, £3,000 in all. As the cast-offs from local industry become more sophisticated (they are

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currently waiting on six Pentiums) so the oldest machines will be replaced. Things can only get better!

School 2 - This school has equipped each classroom in the past with RM 186 computers. They have decided to buy a number of new machines and they have cabled each classroom with cat 5 UTP cable. This means that, although many classrooms don't have machines which can plug into the network, the ones that do have network cards can take advantage of the network. It has meant the number of printers required has been drastically reduced. They have bought two new colour printers and have been given 2 laser printers. Because these are connected to the network with a printer station (Intel in Business Print Server - £200), they can be shared by any machine connected to the network. They do not currently have a Server but that will be the next big investment for them. The machines on the network run Windows 98 and have folders/directories shared between each other for things like Clip Art, class-work and a simple Intranet. The software that works really well is RM Maths. As in the past there has been an attempt to ensure that the software used is consistent across most of the classes. All network points go back to a central hub in the school which is open space at the moment, but will become their computer suite when the work surfaces have been installed. The caretaker is undertaking this job - using breakfast bar surfaces (£30 each [x 3 metres]). The school has had sixteen network points installed at a cost of £800 including the hub.

And so to LINUX- the Unix o/s for the masses ...

What would you want to see before you went down the LINUX route? Think about it.

Well I've just seen something that has made an old sceptic like me sit up and take note. The Navaho Internet server (Navaho.co.uk). My guess is these guys will shake RM and NT to the core (Kernel).

What do they offer? Well for one, the virtually free Red Hat Linux box. They give you:

*Local or remote Server admin

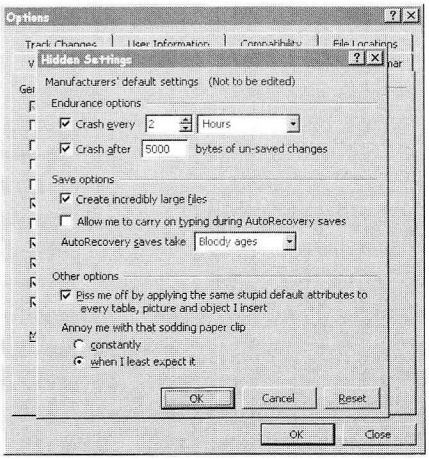
* Controlled access to the internet (both time control and filtering)

* Includes mail news, fax, SMS, PIMSystem (Personal Information Management)

* Station Management

All controlled with a simple Web browser (Netscape, Ie, Fresco and others).

Just another thought on LINUX I've just installed a variant of LINUX (ha, ha!) - the FreeBSD (Berkeley Software Distribution). I was very impressed with how easy it was to install this over the internet but the phone bill is not for the faint hearted! I haven't got very far with it but I have been helped by using a LINUX workstation which has been set up on the Internet for free. I'll post the site at rmug.org.uk when I find it again - oops. I'll keep you informed as to how I get on with this over the coming months.


Options
Hidden Settings
Manufacturers' default settings (Not to be edited)
Endurance options
Crash every 2 Hours
Crash after 5000 bytes of un-saved changes
Save options
Create incredibly large files
Allow me to carry on typing during AutoRecovery saves
AutoRecovery saves take Bloody ages
Other options
Piss me off by applying the same stupid default attributes to every table, picture and object I insert
Annoy me with that sodding paper clip
constantly
when I least expect it
OK
Cancel
Reset
OK
Close

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Minutes of RMUG AGM

Minutes of RMUG AGM held at the Kirk Hallam School, Nr. Ilkeston
Saturday, 23rd October 1999

The meeting was attended by 15 members.

Committee members who attended were: Howard Kirkman, (Chairman), Maureen Wernham, Edith Todd, Gisela Legg, Richard Bird, John Fothergill, David Palmer, Peter Richards.

1. Minutes of AGM of October 24th 1998: Peter Richards proposed that these be agreed to be a true record (seconded by Lyndon Evans) This was passed unanimously

2. Matters arising: none.

3. Officers' Reports
Chairman
Howard Kirkman began by thanking Maureen for the hard work involved in the enormous task of organising yet another successful Training Weekend, particularly difficult this year because of the new dual site format. However, this has eased the burden for those used to transporting and setting up hardware on site. The committee is now convinced that this is a viable format, and welcome feedback and opinions from members on details. Next year's event will be at St. Julian's School, Newport, S. Wales, which has good motorway access and hotel accommodation.

Treasurer
The statement of accounts for 1998 – 99 was circulated prior to the meeting and are attached. Gisela reported that she had only taken over all files from her predecessor four weeks ago. David Palmer noted that income now exceeded expenditure, indicating the success of corrective measures taken two years ago on subscriptions and publications.
Secretary
Edith summarised her written report. There have been 7 committee meetings, with an average attendance of 6 out of the 10 members elected. Two committee members had resigned earlier in the year. A sub-committee of Howard, John, David and Richard have also as a sub-committee met to consider publications and web site development. She thanked the Heads of Bedales and King Edwards, Witley, for accommodation and hospitality for meetings, saving considerable costs.
Membership Secretary
Numbers are still falling. Membership stands at less than 200.

4. Membership Services
Howard talked about the concerns of the committee over the last year. A major issue is balancing costs with access for members. The committee's view is that
· The magazine is no longer viable due to production and distribution costs
· The newsletter, less costly to produce and seems popular, should continue
· The Web Site is least costly of all and is the way forward.

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Feedback and views from the membership are sought on these three options. There was much discussion on the topic, covering the following points

· Most members now have access to the internet and email.

· Members will accept text files and forgo colour and presentation for greater speed of communication.

· Newsletter could be emailed as either an Acrobat file or HTML format.

· A disk version could be sent to those without Internet access.

· In response to a proposal from Lyndon Evans that publications be in electronic format, Ray Fleming (RM) indicated that recipients place less value on electronic information than on hard copy. Others disagreed. Emails are read. Paper is binned.

· Possibility of problems due to changing email addresses.

· Some flyers would still be required for e.g. training weekend.

· Lack of copy from members for publication

· Possibility of reducing subscription is unlikely because of cost of web site development

· Subscriptions do not cover the committee overheads e.g. meetings, travel, costs of collecting subs.

· Focal point becoming the training weekend and information exchange not publications.

· Possibility of changing group's name to emphasise training role.

The second issue discussed concerned the relationship between RM and the User Group. This centred on

· RM focus has shifted from hardware to software and services

· RM perspective less essential; schools use generic packages and both RM and non RM hardware.

· Evolution of RMUG from technical help network to training.

· Demand for training at reasonable cost.

· Emphasis on user group as group with shared interests, teachers helping teachers. All users can benefit. This may be hindered by RM connection.

· Need for wider focus for User Group.

· Purpose and nature of the group could be redefined.

· Debate on change of name for RMUG and possible loss of focus and historical links, e.g "Education and RM User Group", "Educational PC User Group".

· Change of sub text (supporting education and training).

· Retain name but emphasise that all users welcome.

· Appreciation for RM support.

Howard thanked everyone for their positive responses. The following were proposed by Peter Richards, seconded by David Palmer; and accepted by the meeting.

The new committee will investigate

· The group's name

· There will be only one more issue of the magazine.

· A gradual transfer to electronic publication of newsletters and other group communications.

5. Election of Officers.

Edith stated that both Norrie Wallace (Vice Chair) and Sian Tilley had resigned from the committee during the year. The committee wish to thank them both for their contributions. Howard (Chair) and David (Editor) have both indicated a

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desire to step down, Howard in a year's time and David as soon as a successor can be found. It is assumed that the Vice Chair will accede to the Chair in due course, but there is currently a gap in this position. The remaining committee members are willing to stand for re-election.

The following were re-elected unopposed.

Chairman Howard Kirkman
Secretary Edith Todd
Treasurer Gisela Legg
Membership Secretary Maureen Wernham
Advertising Gisela Legg
Software Librarian Pete Richards
John Fothergill.

The following new members were proposed and elected
Maureen Blackburn
Beryl Packman

Editor David Palmer has been co-opted to the committee.

The following members offered to contribute to the committee via email, but could not attend meetings
Keith Kinder
Ian Burgess
Lyndon Evans (may attend occasionally)

6. Remuneration of Officers

Training weekend organiser: Increase to £350 proposed by David Palmer, seconded Lyndon Evans, and agreed by those present. Maureen stated that she would only accept this if there were sufficient funds.

Editor: Agreed at current levels of Magazine £275, Newsletter £90. Web management t.b.a. by committee.

Advertising manager: 10% of revenue. Gisela is willing to drop this. It was agreed that this should continue.

7. A.O.B.

Life membership: David proposed that the institution of a new category of life membership, the rate to be determined by the committee. This was agreed.

It was also unanimously agreed that Honorary Life membership be offered to Maureen Wernham. Maureen thanked the User Group for this gesture.

Corporate membership: Ian Burgess suggested this category be considered.

Editor: No offers have been received. The position must be re-defined and re-advertised.

New Group Name: Those delegates who have not attended meeting to be canvassed for suggestions.

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Web Authoring Review

by Maureen Blackburn

RMUG Annual Training Weekend
From Maureen Blackburn, IT Technician-Ripon Grammar School
Date 3rd. Nov 1999

Comments

As a first-time participant at the RMUG Training Weekend may I say how enjoyable and valuable I found the whole event.

The choice of accommodation and tuition venue were excellent and I was impressed by the pleasant and welcoming manner of everyone concerned.

My choice of "Web Authoring" was based on my need to master Front Page in order to use the RM School Intranet Package with which we are intending to design and construct our Intranet at the school.

The session was led most efficiently by Lyndon Evans, who introduced his topic as "Get Started in Web Publishing using Front Page 98".

A short preamble to the hands-on session gave the advice to "keep it simple". This would enable anyone to visit the site using a basic machine without losing any of the content or waiting too long for loading.

A web site, we were informed, consisted of Design - Layout - Style - Content.

Our task was to master how to create that content, whatever its format or target group.

Once the intricacies of the system logon were solved we were into the software and poised to create our first Web page.

Using Lyndon's excellent hand-out, we followed the step-by-step guide to creating a Home Page and two levels of sub page. This entailed negotiating Front Page Explorer and Editor, using the usual procedures in text creation such as formatting, bold, indenting, bullets etc.

We progressed to inserting tables, images, banners, animations and imported text from files.

We found tables were quickly created in Front Page unlike the more complex procedure apparently in HTML

By hypertext linking we were able to jump from home page to sub pages and access the information therein, trying all the time to maintain an easily-navigable structure to our masterpiece.

Concluding with placing a "hit counter" on our site's home page (to keep us informed as to its popularity or otherwise!) Prototype One was complete.

I found Front Page very user-friendly and feel that staff with only basic skills would be able to create their own subject pages easily with this package. The less steep the learning curve, the more staff we are likely to be able to involve.

Lyndon was always on hand to solve the problems and answer the endless queries.

Advice was given at least to "test the waters" of HTML and discussion ensued on the relative merits of various other packages such as Office 97, Office 2000 and Publisher.

Questions concerning frames, downloads and zip files were answered in an easily-understandable manner, the whole session ended far too quickly but left everyone I have no doubt with a desire for more.

THANK YOU, LYNDON.

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Data-logging

by Andrew Miller

RMUG Annual Training Weekend

This session was lead by Andy Monk from Bedales School, Petersfield, Hampshire. Data-logging, the acquiring of experimental data using a computer together with the necessary hardware interface, is an excellent way of complying with the National Curriculum requirement that ICT is involved in the teaching and learning of Science. A far better reason, in my view, is that it allows more and better data to be collected from experimental work, leading to higher quality results. It allows the pupil to spend time understanding and analysing the theory behind the experiment rather than in tedious and time-consuming measurement activity.

However, not every experiment lends itself to data-logging and even if it does the experimental conditions need to be carefully chosen to ensure that the measurements obtained are genuine and meaningful. This course was arranged as a circus of experiments for us to try and was designed to show seven example applications of data-logging to the teaching of chemistry, physics and biology.

The experiments were:

- The heat change in the reaction of zinc with copper(II) sulphate (temperature measurement).
- Measuring the rate of reaction between marble chips and hydrochloric acid (mass measurement).
- Measuring the rate of reaction between sodium thiosulphate and hydrochloric acid (light measurement).
- Acid-base titration – measuring the pK_a of a weak acid (simultaneous mass and pH measurements).
- Emission rate of heat from bodies of different colours (temperature measurement).
- Exploring simple harmonic motion (angle measurement).
- Understanding the huddling behaviour of penguins (temperature measurement).

There are a number of commercially-available data-logging systems designed for use in schools. Andy Monk introduced us to the newest version of the LogIT system, manufactured by DCP Microdevelopments. The hardware and software were both very simple to use, an excellent feature being that worthwhile results could usually be obtained by allowing the default settings to prevail, just as a pupil might without any direct guidance. For those of us with a shortage of PCs in the laboratory (most of us!) or those who don't want chemicals poured all over our PCs (all of us!), these data-loggers are intelligent and can be used remotely and the data downloaded to the PC later on. If the data-logger is used connected to the PC it transfers data immediately rather than storing it. Some of us were also able to look at a software product called Insight 2, which is able to collect, present and analyse data from a variety of different third-party data-logging hardware manufacturers.

The course was a excellent introduction for those with no experience of data-logging. Old hands found some excellent

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tried and tested ideas in the seven circus experiments, which we are sure to use in our own teaching soon! Many thanks to Andy Monk for his time and effort on this excellent presentation.

Useful contacts for **LogIT** are:
DCP Microdevelopments Ltd, Edison House, Bow Street, Great Ellingham, Norfolk NR17 1JB, Tel. 01953 457800, 01953 457888 (Fax)
www.dcpmicro.com, info@dcpmicro.com

Insight 2 has been developed by:
Laurence Rogers, Leicester University, School of Education, Andrew Miller, 21 University Road, Leicester. LE1 7RF
and published by Longman Logotron.

THE FIGHTING KANGAROOS

MUTANT MARSUPIALS TAKE UP ARMS AGAINST AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

The reuse of some object-oriented code has caused tactical headaches for Australia's armed forces. As virtual reality simulators assume larger roles in helicopter combat training, programmers have gone to great lengths to increase the realism of their scenarios, including detailed landscapes and – in the case of the Northern Territory's Operation Phoenix – herds of kangaroos (since disturbed animals might well give away a helicopter's position).

The head of the Defense Science & Technology Organization's Land Operations/Simulation division reportedly instructed developers to model the local marsupials' movements and reactions to helicopters. Being efficient programmers, they just re-appropriated some code originally used to model infantry detachment reactions under the same stimuli, changed the mapped icon from a soldier to a kangaroo, and increased the figures' speed of movement.

Eager to demonstrate their flying skills for some visiting American pilots, the hotshot Aussies "buzzed" the virtual kangaroos in low flight during a simulation. The kangaroos scattered, as predicted, and the visiting Americans nodded appreciatively . . . then did a double-take as the kangaroos reappeared from behind a hill and launched a barrage of Stinger missiles at the hapless helicopter. (Apparently the programmers had forgotten to remove that part of the infantry coding.)

The lesson? Objects are defined with certain attributes, and any new object defined in terms of an old one inherits all the attributes. The embarrassed programmers had learned to be careful when reusing object-oriented code, and the Yanks left with a newfound respect for Australian wildlife. Simulator supervisors report that pilots from that point onward have strictly avoided kangaroos, just as they were meant to.

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What and Why in ICT

by Richard Young

I belong to the UK-schools mailing list. (Please let me know if you are interested in joining too). There has recently been quite a bit of debate about the role of the ICT co-ordinator and I thought that two contributors made particularly interesting points so I asked them if I could print what they said:

What and Why in ICT teaching - beyond contextualised skills teaching?

Let me pose a 'new-boy' question. After a decade out of front line classroom teaching, I find myself delivering ICT to years 7, 8 and 9 on a carousel. That is, I get a class for one hour a week per term, i.e. about 12 hours.

The school will change to one hour per week per year, i.e. 40 hours, and we will work closely to the new QCA KS3 Scheme of Work - once it is out!!

That is the future... what about the rest of the year?

As a re-entrant I have missed out on the debate that must have taken place as to what (and why) we are teaching in ICT. My dilemma is this. What exactly do I expect my Year 7 class to be able to do at the end of the term? What sort of outcomes can I expect. What evidence of learning and achievement?

I am confused over the 'ICT skills' debate. To my mind the best analogy is the 'journey by car' one. To produce successful drivers who can pass their driving test, we need to teach students how change gear, indicate, look into the mirror, reverse, etc. We also need to show students how to read a map and make a sensible choice re destination.

In computer terms, it is useful for a student to be able to spell-check, drag and drop, cut and paste, and align objects. These are the tools for the job. It is also useful to know graphical principles such as contrast, alignment, white space and grouping. These make a piece of work look 'professional' and offer a 'writing framework'.

So as I revise my set of 10 lessons for Year 7 for 2000, what should be my lesson objectives? Am I right in thinking that 'teaching skills' is frowned upon? Is it terribly wrong to say that by the end of this lesson students will know how to use a table to line-up text; or use contrasting fonts to create an effect; or use text appropriate to the audience. Is setting a context like 'imagine you are running a newspaper, let me show you how columns work' just contextualised skills teaching? I am sure these are embarrassing questions for the vastly-experienced practitioners out there, but indulge my curiosity. How do you tackle the 'skills teaching' dilemma? What are the sorts of lesson objectives that you set?
In anticipation of some helpful dialogue (PS While musing), just how do you

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handle the 14 computers to 28 pupils issue?

Our current ICT provision needs a complete overhaul and I shall be spending a substantial part of the Christmas holidays trying to put in place new lessons and a new scheme of work. So following best management practice I am establishing what other 'best practitioners' are doing:

Can I ask for your views or ideas in any or all of the following areas:

* *Interesting Contexts*. It seems to me that ICT has two scissor blades: the skills and techniques needed to accomplish a task (e.g. cut and paste) and the application of acquired techniques to problem solving. I am having real problems conceptualising interesting and stimulating contexts. E.g. I am trying to develop a newspaper context for year 7 i.e. a curriculum experience which they can relate to and be inspired by. My biggest worry is spreadsheet work. How do you develop opportunities for relevant and motivational work where students start to model rather than bang in data into cells with no real feel for the underpinning concepts involved? * Homework what range of activities do you expect year 7, 8, 9 and 10 to undertake. * Differentiation In my year 7 class there were students who were highly confident and competent with a computer and some who had never held a mouse before! How do you handle such a wide range of ict abilities ie how do you ensure that the able and novice are appropriately developed?

* *Assessment*. Having developed a notion of what to teach, how do you assess against nc levels. Do you have exemplars of work by strand. E.g. This is a level 3 piece of work. If xyz were addressed it would become a level 5-6 item of evidence. What techniques do you use for assessment?

* *Desk Work. We* always have more pupils than machines and every lesson 6 or so students do not have access to a machine. In your view, what sort of activities can they usefully undertake.

* *Resources*. Are there any commercial resources you suggest I investigate?

Long list I know, but any advice you can offer most gratefully received. It means I may even be able to take Christmas afternoon off!

Richard Young, 31 Newland Mill, Witney, OX8 6HH.

email: richard-young@lineone.net
Wood Green School Witney
www.woodgreen.oxon.sch.uk

The role of ICT co-ordinator

I have read with interest all the postings from ICT co-ordinators re NOF training etc. I am ICT co-ordinator for a primary school in Scotland and was chosen because the school needed one and because I am the member of staff with the most interest. I recently attended a LEA meeting about training and connectivity. While I understand the

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financial timescales etc., I am unclear as to my role. I read of ICT co-ordinators dealing with setting up networks etc. but fail to see how I can become involved with this as I am not in management and have been allocated no time out of class for ICT duties. Can anyone tell me if active ICT co-ordinators out there are full time class-committed teachers or have arrangements been set up to free them. Thank you.

I am a full time IT co-ordinator and Y4 class teacher in an 11 class school, with 4 computers in each classroom. I manage approx. 50 computers, working towards having 10 on a peer-to-peer network. I chose to configure the machines to the network, and set new ones we buy, upgrade memory, etc. because of the large amounts of money we were being quoted (£200 to connect 2 computers to the network/internet). The only technical bits I don't do are repairs to printers or monitors - these are contracted out. Yes - it takes huge amounts of time, nearly all after school/at weekend (I've been promised a day to load software on to 10 machines and upgrade from W3 to Win95) but at least all classrooms are well resourced and teachers know that down-time is kept to a minimum so they have the confidence to include ICT in their plans.

In theory I read that an ICT co-ordinator should be leading on teaching and learning, not acting as a technician - but unless you can afford one, or managed services, do we have a choice? It's a question of funding which needs to be addressed, as the numbers of machines in a school increases. Perhaps you could "rent" a few hours from a Sec'y school technician, or pay a parent or, like my wife's school, a 17 year old whizz-kid! I know of no school where the ICT co-ord gets significant time off.

Hope this helps,

Nigel

ASK A SIMPLE QUESTION ...

by Diana Rolf

Six words are guaranteed to strike a chill into the heart of any teacher: "Sir, why are we doing this?" The chill factor from this well-worn missile in the armoury of school children is caused by the serious issue the question raises. If it is asked at all, the lesson has faltered. If it cannot be answered, the lesson is lost. Simple questions are powerful tools: they rock boats.

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I well remember the thrill I felt when first asked to write for RM User. The thrill was repeated when I saw my first issue. The writers were a disparate bunch, ranging from the flippant (me) to the technical (P. the P.), but we all had one thing in common. We have all, at some time or other, sat in front of a computer screen well into the small hours, asking a simple question: "Why doesn't this work?" If you ask this in the street, the staff room, or a pub, you will be met with blank looks. If you ask one of the computer corporations, like Microsoft or RM, you will be quietly taken into corner and sold a thousand pounds' worth of their product. But in RM User you get solutions. Not being very technical myself I enjoyed the magazine because of the form the questions took, but when I passed it round, much more technical people than me soon prowled round my desk waiting for the post to be opened so they could pounce on each new issue and devour the answers.

My journeys into computer screens have taken me to strange places. It's been a journey in itself to report back at each stage, in the hope that it might be interesting, or informative, or give out warnings on the way so others can avoid the pot-holes. The whole reason I do this, of course, is at the insistence of David, the Editor, who has developed RM User the way he has.

Desk-top publishing has been another of my journeys also. I have edited newsletters myself, not so glossy as RMU but for many years, so I can well understand the sheer hard work which goes into every issue, and admire the professionalism which makes it seem easy and entertaining.

So in what form will you get your answers now? There are other places. Many national newspapers feature ICT - but beware the tight replies, lifted from other sources and squeezed into a small space. There are countless glossy and expensive magazines devoted to ICT - but beware the vast amount of repetitive commercial hype which buries answers in sales-talk. You can join e-mail Lists, E-groups, newsgroups and chat lines. You will find communities there, speedy answers, and support of all kinds - and also quite a lot of vested interest, rogue salesmen, and in some cases, outright hostility. What you will not be able to do is read them over coffee for a quiet chuckle, or keep them on the shelf to refer to when your error message won't go away. So RM User will be very much missed.

Will RM User continue in some form? Perhaps in a new format, or on the Web itself? Only David and the committee can tell us, and he's sure to keep you informed. But what is really important is for ordinary users to keep on asking them, and demand answers.

I've enjoyed RM User immensely - it's been useful, and it's been a lot of fun. And you can't say that about much in the computing world these days!

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A look back and a tiny look forwards

by Steve Rochford

I'm writing this early in January 2000 and I seem to have seen a large number of reviews of the past century and millennium. I've not been alive for quite that long but I have completed almost 20 years of working in education; so I thought a brief look back and then forwards might be interesting. When I started teaching Chemistry and Physics in 1980 there were very few computers in most schools; we had a single RML 380z. For those of you who've never seen one of these it had a large (19" wide) black metal case and a black metal keyboard. It plugged into a green screen monitor and although it was available with disc drives we didn't have them - we used a cassette recorder. (Actually, we used 2 cassette recorders and a controller which would allow you to load a file from one tape, process it and then write it to the other tape - the controller stopped and started the tapes as necessary).

There wasn't an awful lot you could do with this that was of real educational value but I'd got the computer bug at University (learning Fortran programming on an ICL1906 mainframe) and I found that it was possible to write simple programs using the BASIC that came with the 380z. Sadly, none of my attempts to enhance my Chemistry teaching have survived!

Soon after this the government decided that computers in schools were a "good thing" and all schools got at least one computer, followed soon after by a printer - we got another 380z, this time with disc drives, and a Walters dot matrix printer (a real tank of a machine; built to shake the floor and print at a decent speed!) Things started moving quite quickly after that; in 1983 I started teaching Computer Studies and the school bought a whole network of BBC computers (the move from Oxford to Cambridge taking place because Acorn were shipping Econet while RML were still talking about their Chain network). Having enough computers for a class to work in pairs meant that it was possible to start teaching something about computers to lots more pupils even though most of what we did was simple programming and, in retrospect, of little value to most of them. At that time there was little off-the-shelf software available - if you wanted something you generally had to write it for yourself. I started developing a series of programs to help manage pupil records. We used Quest as the database and my programs were more geared to reporting and analysis - Quest was one of those programs for which the term "user hostile" was invented. Sadly, at that time the school office didn't have any access to computers so the exercise was not as successful as it might have been.

In January 1985 I started a new job and I also went to an exhibition at the Barbican; this was the first of what was later to become BETT. I can't remember very much about it but this was the show where RML launched the Nimbus computer - a massive improvement on anything

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previously seen in education and much better than the IBM PC which was becoming common in some companies. By now, schools had access to a range of useful software - it was possible to use a computer as a word processor, for example, or as a drawing tool (does anyone else remember PXED - a pixel editor), and the IT revolution was starting to move rapidly. IBM were involved in a number of schemes to help develop the use of computers in schools - we had a small number of their PCs as part of the "IBM PC as a whole school resource" project and we put them to good use in the school administration. We bought a Qume daisywheel printer; very expensive (about £1000), very heavy, very noisy but giving quality as good as a typewriter!

By 1991 I'd moved to a school which had just installed an extensive network infrastructure - lots of network sockets around the school and fibre optic cables linking the buildings. It seems strange that just over 8 years ago we could have a network based on 286 file servers with just 60Mb hard drives and 4Mb of RAM! (By contrast I now manage a network where the servers have nearly about 40Gb of disc space and 1Gb of RAM!) Those of you who have been reading the magazine for some time will know what happened next - by then I was editing the magazine and my tales of joy and woe filled RM User!

Looking back on the 90s I suppose the main thing that happened was that more and more pupils and teachers started using computers as just another tool. If a teacher wanted a list of pupils then they'd pull them from a networked database. Worksheets could be prepared on a word processor or desktop published - an end to the Banda! Computers have become vastly easier to use - but I'm still not convinced that a dancing paperclip in Office is really an enhancement.

The year 2000 seems to have started without any of the major catastrophes which some people forecast (one of my former pupils now works in Dallas, Texas and tells me that the paranoia amongst some people there was extreme). In part, of course, this is because many people spent a lot of time, effort and money making sure that there would be no major problems and in part it's because we were never likely to see the end of civilisation! The next major problem comes in about 38 years' time when computers which store the date as the number of seconds since January 1970 start getting confused. Hopefully, we'll fix that long before it becomes critical but I rather hope I'll have retired by then!

So where do we go next? The most massive change in computer use has been brought about by the Internet and in particular by the World Wide Web. Just 5 years ago I looked at it and thought it was very pretty but would never be of use - how wrong I was! It now provides a wealth of information at little or no cost; some of it good, some bad, some simply wrong and can enhance the education of almost all children. I'm still sure that there'll always be a place for books and other sources of information but the Internet is a massive addition to the resources of any school.

Intranets have almost made a huge difference to many companies and can do the same for schools. I work in an FE college with over 10,000 students and nearly 1,000 staff. Our intranet provides

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a range of information - all student records are available through it, our phone book is there and a variety of other information which would once have been sent out as paper memos is now published electronically.

Email is another technology which can transform working; once everyone has easy access to a computer to read their email then it becomes an incredibly valuable tool. No more writing memos and putting them in a pigeon hole, hoping that they'll be read today - a quick email and you know that it's been safely delivered and will be acted on. Email is also far less intrusive than the phone; if I answer the phone then I have to deal with the caller, even though it might interrupt what I'm doing. If I read an email then I can choose to respond to it immediately or I can just flag it with a reminder to pop up later in the day so that I don't forget it.

Not everything about the Internet and email has been good; they've also brought with them viruses and hoaxes about viruses. If ever you read an email warning you about a virus outbreak please make your resolution for 2000 to be to re-read it carefully and think about what it says before you forward it to everyone in your address book. If it contains phrases like "AOL say this is the worst virus ever found and there is no cure" then it's a hoax. All the big computer companies do put out regular security bulletins but none of them word their messages like this; they're all calmly written, stating facts and suggesting solutions (there are no viruses for which there is "no cure"; no matter what attacks your computer a reformat and reinstall from backup will fix it!)

The TES last week included the statistic that there are now over 1 million computers in schools. This sounds like a huge number but it's probably still not enough. Perhaps we'll never have enough but two recent phenomena may change this. The first is that many pupils now have mobile phones (and I sympathise with teachers who feel that too many pupils have mobile phones). The second is the development of phones which can also be web browsers. If the price of the phones continues to fall then perhaps they will become as ubiquitous as calculators. I wouldn't want to try composing a long essay on the keyboard and screen of a typical phone but it should be possible to read information from them and follow multiple choice type information trails.

Apple are now the largest computer supplier in American education. This is another statistic gleaned from the TES and is just slightly misleading. Apple have slightly less than a quarter of the market; the rest is split among many suppliers of PC clone machines – so you weren't wasting your time if you went to the BETT exhibition and looked at PCs and their software!

BETT this year seemed to have more big corporate stands with little of value for the ordinary teacher (unless you're about to buy a complete new network) and fewer of the stands selling useful software - or perhaps I just missed them. The whole thing is now so enormous that you can no longer turn up and expect to see it all - you really need to plan your excursion beforehand but this means that you could well exclude certain companies just because you don't know what they do. I

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used to like just looking at everything; much was irrelevant but I was sure to find something of value tucked away somewhere.

I doubt that computers will ever replace teachers, no matter how many of them we have or how powerful they become but they have certainly made huge changes in the past 20 years; even if change continues at the same pace for the next 20 then I think that the classroom will be a very different place.

USING SPREADSHEETS

by Brian Turner

Brian Turner did an excellent presentation on using spreadsheets in school. He has given me some worksheets to put on the RMUG website and this is his cover sheet! Thanks, Brian!

The files in this folder are all either Word '97 documents or Excel '97 worksheets.

All the materials have been developed by the Mathematics Department at King Edward's School, Witley, over the last few years and most of them are still in regular use.

The Word documents we photocopy as handouts for classes. The Excel worksheets we have in a shared area of the school Network so that the pupils can work on them on screen and then print out what they have done.

Brian Turner, who is Head of Mathematics at KES, referred to some of these ideas to illustrate the talk that he gave about Using Spreadsheets at the RM User Group Weekend in October 1999.

Teachers who have a basic knowledge of Excel and want to gain more experience of producing charts or using formulae might find it helpful to work through some of the sheets.

There are answers supplied for some of the exercises.

Teachers of Mathematics or ICT might like to try using some of these ideas with classes that they teach. There is no copyright on them yet! Each file states which year group we use the ideas with at KES but they could well be appropriate at other stages depending on pupils' knowledge of the maths topics and their experience of using spreadsheets.

The raw data used in some of the Excel files (e.g. Soldier's chests, Cuckoo's eggs, and Choir heights) was downloaded from the Data and Story Library:
http://lib.stat.cmu.edu/DASL/

There is a very good book called "Spreadsheets for Mathematics and Information Technology" by Andrew Rothery published by John Murray in 1991 ISBN 0-7195-8463-2

The book contains photocopiable activity worksheets for pupils. We use quite a few of them with Years 8 and 9.

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PUBLISHING OR PROGRAMMING?

by Judy Keiner

PUBLISHING OR PROGRAMMING?

A FRAMEWORK FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND PRESENTATION OF WORK BY CHILDREN ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB.

Paper presented at SIGGRAPH97, Los Angeles.

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Publishing or Programming? In 1996 Dr Idit Harel presented Kids and the WWW: A Metaview at SIGGRAPH 96. A remarkable multimedia presentation in its own right, it set out to provide one of the first theorized maps of the way forward for those who want to help children tap the potential of the Web. Dr Harel visualized child Web users as experimenters and researchers, liberated from the constraints of "pollution by a schoolish atmosphere", as she put it.

I take issue with this vision, because I think that both Harel's view and that of Seymour Papert from which it has evolved are based on two core assumptions which are time-warped in the late sixties when Papert's pioneering work was first developed. The first assumption reflects the period when leading radical educationists, inspired partly by the work of Paolo Freire, advocated deschooling as the way to end the chronic failures and inequalities of traditional schooling. Schools and teachers were seen as irremediably stuck in pedagogies and curricula formulated for training the obedient routine-following factory workers of the smokestack and assembly line led industries of the past.

The second assumption is that empowering children to use the potential of the WWW is about creating their own Web artefacts, ultimately about teaching them programming. As with Papert, Harel envisages children "creating miniworlds". This was precisely the goal of Papertís advocacy of Logo, in Mindstorms as the essence of IT use. Although the Mindstorms model has been extremely influential amongst educators, Logo has proved to be a virtual dead end, with the vast majority of successful IT use by children today involving the use of generic and other programs as investigative and publication tools

World Wide Web publication offers real audiences—worldwide. Published research on email and emerging perspectives on WWW publication alike suggest that the key transformative impacts on children are those of seeing evidence that their work is being published, read and responded to

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worldwide. Unlike paper publication, the WWW offers child authors both one-to-many communication with a huge audience and one-to-one response from individual readers, who can be easily offered linked email response facilities.

Given that the key feature is publication, then the best starting point is process models of writing, of which the best known exponent is Donald Graves. Process writing stresses that the ultimate goal of writing for children is publication for "real audiences"—that is for people, other than teachers, who will read out of intrinsic interest in content.

The concept of publication for real audiences worldwide also provides a way of developing a unified approach to helping children become successful users as well as authors on the Web. Harelís vision includes the use of the Web as a research tool. It is easy to agree that having access to experts, libraries and museums worldwide is potentially liberating for children. However, I believe that she underestimates the degree of structuring and guidance children need to acquire the skills to access the resources they offer in a way which proves rewarding rather than ultimately frustrating.

Using Process Writing Approaches

Process approaches to writing stress the importance of modelling and scaffolding in helping children become successful authors for real audiences.

Modelling has two strands. It focuses on helping child authors to develop the same processes of conceptualization, drafting and revision as those used by successful adult authors. Process writing model emphasizes the importance of children working alongside adult or older peer mentors, towards the production of artefacts which mimic the formats and presentational styles of commercially published adult authors. It also stresses the importance of offering children good adult models of published work. In literary terms, this means ensuring that children are constantly being given access to outstanding published work by "real" authors, in preference to textbooks and basal readers. So it becomes important that children read and have read to them not only the best books by authors writing for children, but also that they have access to adult reference books and are inducted into using them by having their mentors share with them the techniques for accessing the information in them.

Applying this concept to developing Web use and authoring for children implies children need plenty of guided surfing, in which they are helped by their mentors to seek information efficiently, and also to talk about what makes a Web site a good one, what makes it worth returning to, what makes it fun to use. They need to be helped to recognise and evaluate examples of different genres of Web page, particularly home pages, magazines, and topic information sites. They need to compare sites which use animation simply to catch the userís eye with those where it helps to inform or explain. They also need to have plenty of examples of colour transparencies or printouts of favourite

pages on which they and their mentors can do this work. This also incorporates approaches which are fundamental to developing a good sense of appropriate graphic design.

Scaffolding aims to help children make the bridge from being users to being authors. Adult graphic designers use storyboard and pencil and paper roughs. Designing and using simple templates for storyboarding and roughing text and graphic presentation on paper is much more likely to help children become confident and original Web authors than either leaving them to their own devices or having them depend on the templates incorporated in commercial programs such as Creative Writer and Front Page. HTML programming can be thought of as analogous to typesetting. We do not expect adult authors or graphic designers to typeset their work for publication. This side of Web publication is best left to adult mentors.

Three criteria for evaluating Web Pages

Quality, Accessibility and Originality of Verbal Content

It is possible to generate an outstanding site which uses very few graphics. Examples include the prizewinning UK based Welford and Wickham School site, which was originally almost entirely text based. Its success was based on the quality of the interactive options offered to visitors. Likewise, the KidPub siteís success springs from its commitment to present all the childrenís stories which are submitted to it, using a simple conservative graphic style.

Quality, Appropriateness and Consistency of Graphic Presentation

Graphic design researchers stress that there is a grammar of visual design, analogous to that of verbal grammar. Readers worldwide depend on conventions of how text and graphics are presented and inter-related to make ready sense of publications, whether they are on paper or onscreen. The fact that HTML programming and more recent WYSIWYG editors make it possible for WWW pages to be designed by individuals with little or no design education produces far too many sites in which the content is undermined by amateurish and sometimes downright perverse graphics. It is not unknown for such sites to be included in "Top 10" sites supposedly carefully rated by experienced experts for their excellence. Kids' Space , placed top of Point's top 5 list of children's sites in March 1997, is a prime example. Its pages include examples of mystificatory captions and line breaks which obscure the meaning of simple sentences. The latter is one of the most elementary errors to be avoided by writers aiming at beginning readers.

Teachers can help children appreciate the quality and usefulness of the graphic devices they find onscreen, as well as sharing selections of exciting original images. Designing and incorporating their own buttons, banners and images and working with adult mentors to incorporate them into their pages with the help of storyboards and roughs is a powerful way to develop their creativity. Both commercial and individual childrenís sites are currently bedevilled by the use of gif libraries of buttons.

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Commercial clip art likewise undermines childrenís sense of their own creativity in ways that photographs do not.

Quality and Appropriateness of Dynamic Content

One of the principal features that distinguishes WWW publication from paper publication is its dynamism—its potential for movement and change. A Web site that stands still is like a video project based on a single shot. It is a commonplace of advice to WWW authors that each site should be constantly updated. We can think of dynamism as operating at different levels. From the point of view of children, the most powerfully motivating factor resulting from their own WWW presence seems to be audience response. Visible evidence of a mounting readership, through the use of page counters, and a continuing stream of email responses from previously unknown readers, via onscreen links, seem to be transformative experiences, especially at the point at which children first make the transition from being WWW users to WWW authors. Dynamism can also derive from interactivity, as readers contribute their ideas or images. On the KidPub site, child users have the options of contributing to a never ending story, sending one of their own, submitting their work as part of a whole school or class, or tapping into a bulletin board.

Dynamism is most thoroughly integrated into a site through incorporating narrativity. For work with children this is most effectively generated by making the site serve to tell the story of work in progress. For teachers, the clearest analogy is to that of the classroom display board. In the hands of a mediocre teacher, the display board is a tombstone. It shows only completed work from which the children have passed on, and it sometimes stays in place for an eternity.

In the hands of an outstanding teacher, the display board is a constantly changing narrative. It maps the work the children are doing on particular topics from launch, through brainstorming and early research, through pilot investigations and expert contributions to the final presentation which is a summation of what has been achieved. Its contents can then become part of an archive or portfolio which is stored in a different format. Not all elements need to be incorporated into a particular genre. An anthology of stories can derive its dynamism simply from the incorporation of page counters to show readership. In one example, the dynamic element derives from the growing number of entries as children submit them for inclusion in the Encyclopaedia.

The framework forms an exciting basis for planning the development of Web publishing projects which will be equally powerful for the children whose work they showcase as for a worldwide audience. For teachers who would like to develop Web projects, starting from concepts they already have mastery of, such as process writing and display management, is likely to be much more empowering for them in opening up the power of the Web to children than stressing mastery of Web technology.

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Here are some URL's to go with Judy's article:-

http://www.reading.ac.uk/~veskeinr/sigcg2.htm
metaview http://www.mamamedia.com/Harel/SIGGRAPH96/home.html
welford & wickham http://www.rmlpc.co.uk/eduweb/sites/wickham/
kidspub http://www.kidpub.org/kidpub/intro.html
kidspace http://www.kids-space.org/
point http://point-uk.lycos.com/reviews/Kids_9488.html
buckman school http://buckman.pps.k12.or.us/room100/bees/bees.html
portland http://www.teleport.com/megaines/women.html
html http://www.infoaccess.com/products/transit/httoc.htm

News

SCHOOLS CRACK DOWN ON NET MUSIC SOFTWARE NAPSTER Oregon State University has barred a software program called Napster that enables users to trade MP3 music files, saying the program violates the school's Internet usage policy. Napster is the target of a lawsuit filed by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), which charges that Napster promotes the distribution of pirated music. Napster allows users to download songs that anyone in the Napster community has bought or illegally copied from a CD, and the program has become popular among college students. Oregon State University became concerned about the program before the RIAA suit, when systems administrators noticed that Napster was consuming 5 percent of the school's bandwidth. Napster activity could have pushed the school over its $75,000 yearly budget for bandwidth, says Oregon State's vice provost for information services Curt Pederson, noting that the school's bandwidth usage would double every 90 days if not controlled. Oregon State's usage policy bans users from trading and storing unauthorized copies on the network, and also prohibits "excessive use of network resources." Other universities, including Northwestern and Oxford, have also banned Napster use on their networks. (CNet, 20 Jan 2000) INTEL, MICROSOFT LAUNCH SCHOOL INITIATIVE Intel and Microsoft are forming a program that will provide technology training to teachers around the world. Intel will provide $100 million in funding, equipment, curriculum development, and program management. Meanwhile, Microsoft will contribute $344 million in software and support. Over the next three years the program is expected to train over 400,000 teachers in 20 nations. Intel CEO Craig Barrett says the initiative is the industry's acknowledgement that "all the educational technology in classrooms today is worth nothing if teachers don't know how to use it effectively." The program will teach Microsoft's Office 2000 and Encarta 2000, with an emphasis on the Internet, desktop publishing, and multimedia applications. The companies hope to help teachers improve lesson plans, locate resources, and prepare multimedia presentations. The high-tech industry favors education as a charitable cause, but critics question the value of technology in the classroom and note the

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lack of technical support in schools. (Wall Street Journal, 21 Jan 2000)

USEFUL LESSON ABOUT TEACHING ON THE NET Distance learning company eCollege.com is appealing to educational institutions from a business perspective. Distance learning is a more scalable business than the conventional educational model, because growth potential with distance learning is not confined by factors such as the number of professors or the size of classrooms. However, schools that try to establish distance learning programs encounter the same difficulties as businesses creating Web sites in terms of choosing content, building transactional systems, and allowing users to communicate with one another. ECollege.com helps schools implement distance learning programs by offering template packages that manage issues such as courses, payments, and grading. The standardized packages allow eCollege.com to build a whole online campus in 60 business days, the company says. Ecollege.com acquired its first customer, the University of Colorado, in 1996, and since then has gained 121 more contracts covering 150 institutions. (Financial Times 12/14/99)

Here's news of BeOS, which is a non-MS computer operating system ..

Be Inc. Announces That Version 5 Will Be Freeware

Be Incorporated today announced that it is shifting its resources to focus primarily on the growing Internet appliance market. In order to maximize the visibility and acceptance of Be technology, the upcoming Version 5 of the BeOS desktop operating system will be available for personal use at no charge ..

"The post-PC revolution of Internet appliances has started," said Jean-Louis Gassee, chairman and chief executive officer of Be. "Our customers and partners, such as Compaq, National Semiconductor, RealNetworks and Qubit, have validated our belief that Be is well positioned to play an important role in this emerging market.

We want to do everything in our power to make the best use of this opportunity. Making the free version of BeOS 5 available through the Internet and other channels allows us to aggressively promote our technology, maximize our visibility and obtain valuable market feedback while aggressively pursuing Internet appliance opportunities."

Be's product for the Internet appliance market is code-named Stinger, a software solution for appliances that deliver information and entertainment over the web. Based on BeOS, Stinger is fully customizable, offers a complete browser and supports popular streaming audio and video standards.

BeOS 5 is the newest version of BeOS, an alternative desktop operating system .. BeOS provides a high-performance and robust platform for all applications, excelling in the areas of audio and video manipulation.

Users will be able to download BeOS 5 via a Web browser and store it as a file within their existing operating system (such as Windows). No repartitioning will be necessary, and launching BeOS 5 will be as simple as double-clicking an icon on the desktop.

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PRINTER'S PIE

by Peter Harris

FUTURE PAPER

The Paperless Office

As Shakespeare would say, " 'Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished" – but Benny Landa (the founder of the Indigo digital printing press company), speaking at the Institute of Printing's Annual Lecture in London recently, revealed his belief in a "paperless future." He did however add: "I don't think our children's children's children will see it, so we can all relax."

The Paper Chase Office Campaign

The leading document management firm Kardex have revealed that

- 47% of businesses say that almost half their existing files are redundant and could be disposed of;
- 55% of businesses predict they'll be using up to 20% MORE paper over the next five years.

During his talks with the Prime Minister in October, Bill Gates was gladdened by the fact that someone had been put in charge of e-commerce. As a by-product of this he believes that using the Internet should enable Whitehall to cut down on paperwork by half.

Visioneer Paperport

I recently had to download a new driver for my scanner because it was no longer compatible with the latest operating system, which made me realise that I had been using it since 1995.

For those who have not seen this device, it is a scanner that sits between the keyboard and the monitor and is approximately fourteen inches long by three inches wide by three inches high. It is permanently on and is activated by placing a sheet through its front. Once on the desktop the document can be printed out, filed for later retrieval, faxed, placed into Adobe Photoshop for editing or sent to OCR software.

As with my Psion Series 3a, which is of a reasonable size, I find the big advantage of electronic filing is that I can find things because I know where they are filed. My paperwork motto is, "I have it if I can find it!"

Feel the Print

Just as typefaces have been developed for special needs such as sending faxes or reading on monitor screens, so have the papermakers developed speciality papers.

One such is Zytex, a novel paper with special applications for the visually-impaired. Braille is still widely taught and used but cannot be used to reproduce diagrams and other documents where positional placement is important – for example, on voting papers.

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The traditional method of making raised diagrams is rather primitive but Zytex is a paper with an expandable coating. After being printed on, the sheets are processed in a heating unit to create a raised image. The paper is so manufactured that it stays flat even though it goes through a lot of hot and cold cycles.

Another speciality paper that we can print on is one that cannot be torn and is waterproof so that it can be read underwater.

Preservation

When the Austrian National Library sought to preserve its huge collection of historic books and newspapers it did so through the use of the "Improved Vienna Method."

Books and newspapers, with their covers and bindings removed, are soaked in a penetrating water-based solution of modified cellulose and borate buffing agents.

The soaking process is undertaken in a vacuum and the blocks of newspapers or books are subsequently shock frozen at -30°C.

After careful thawing, they are then restored to their covers. The whole process takes a fortnight.

This contrasts with my attitude to my Latin textbook – this bore the message: "In case of fire, please throw in!"

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary

On my father's death I was handed down his two volumes of the Oxford English Dictionary which had type so small that a magnifying glass was provided when you were researching any word in depth.

"PC Pro" (December issue) carries a CD on the front that includes the full version of New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary. At a cost of only £2.99 this represents tremendous value (the original product was £29.99).

The Dictionary has been very intelligently transferred from one publishing medium to another and is a joy to use. Highly recommended!

E-Paper

The boffins at the Palo Alto Research Centre (PARC) have a number of innovative successes to their name, including the graphical user interface on computers (first used commercially by Apple), the concept of an independent page description language manifest in Interpress (this was a predecessor of PostScript, developed by Adobe), the Ethernet local area network, and much else.

One of the latest developments to emerge is electronic paper. There are two competing versions available at the moment: the Xerox PARC paper developed by Nicholas Sheridon, and one produced by E Ink, a company set up in 1997 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to develop and market an electronic paper developed by physicist Joe Jacobson. I have been following developments closely on the Internet.

The Potential

Electronic paper combines the virtues of paper with the flexibility of an LCD screen. Like conventional paper it stores an image, is portable, is of comparable

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thickness, and can be viewed in reflective light over a wide viewing angle. However, it can also display images generated remotely and transferred by infra-red or radio waves, or via standard cables from a computer.

Just like an LCD screen it can be re-used millions of times, making it ideal for digital books and newspapers. The first commercial application was used by J. C. Penney (the American store chain) in a retail sign in May last year (1999). Electronic devices and displays will be next, but remain several years in the future.

George Lucas hints of this future with the digital version of "The Phantom Menace" which is showing in four theatres in Los Angeles and New York. If cinemas can afford the £40,000 re-equipment cost we should be able to see higher quality productions as, unlike film, which deteriorates with usage, the digital master quality stays the same. Distribution costs should also be lower as either satellite or fibre-optic links can be used.

Immedia Display Technology

The World's First Commercial Electronic Ink Display is described as follows: "The signs in J. C. Penney are suspended in a graceful curve that highlights the thinness and flexibility of electronic ink. Stretching four feet wide by six feet long, the signs are less than 3 millimetres thick and weigh only 8.7 pounds. Even while updating the message every ten seconds, each sign consumes less energy than a household light bulb."

At the moment if a large retail chain wishes to have a common point-of-sale message that is updated frequently the only way to do this is to is to design, print, distribute and display many thousands of paper signs on a frequent basis. One of the advantages of a sign that uses e-paper is that by including a wireless pager and internet software a large retailer can change messages in a single store or across the entire chain in a matter of seconds.

It is hoped that eventually there will be electronic books and digital wireless newspapers. Just as e-mail has transformed the sending of messages to business associates, friends and relatives so e-paper should transform the communications industry. In our printing industry the message is changing from "print and then distribute" to "distribute and then print."

The Two Versions of E-paper

Early last year the NEW SCIENTIST magazine devoted four pages to the topic of e-paper, complete with super-techie description of the technology involved.

Crudely described, the Xerox laboratory paper consists of tiny plastic spheres suspended evenly in a layer of transparent rubber. The polyethylene spheres are each half white and half black and are charged so that they exhibit an electric dipole – the black plastic holds a positive charge and the white plastic holds a negative charge. These polar spheres are then aligned – either black or white uppermost – according to the direction of an applied voltage supplied via a grid of electrodes on each side of the sheet.

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At the moment the resolution of 110 dpi is suitable only for large displays, but higher resolutions of 300dpi should be possible shortly.

The material used by E Ink is similar in concept to, but different in execution from, the Xerox version. Instead of rotating spheres it relies on negatively-charged microparticles of ground titanium dioxide (the white pigment found in paint) encapsulated with a black dye in a tough transparent capsule.

Each side of the paper is patterned with a layer of tiny electrodes that causes the applied voltage to either attract or repel the tiny capsules. (The amazing thing about this technology is that the thickness of this e-paper is approximately that of office paper, and the resolution available is 600dpi). If the upper electrode is positive, the white particles come to the surface, and if the voltage is reversed the particles are driven below the black dye.

The original form of printing from raised type was called "letterpress," but most printing today is produced by "offset lithography" though digital printing is steadily making inroads into its market share. However, another form of printing "screen printing" (a process similar in concept to stencilling that we used to use in the nursery class) has always been used extensively for point-of-sale notices, and E Ink can be printed using existing screen printing processes on to virtually any surface, be it paper, clothing, teacups or blocks of flats.

E-Books

I can well remember carrying a satchel full of heavy textbooks home from school so that I had the information available at hand to do my homework. The children of today have other means of accessing information, but the newspaper boy (or girl) certainly has a much bigger load than when I was at school.

In contrast to having to carry many books, it is predicted that in future we should all possess just one book of many blank pages that would transform itself into whatever book we wanted to read by having access to tiny chips embedded in the spine or cover. Future advances in nano technology may eventually allow an entire library to be stored in this way.

The future of E-paper

Just as advances in computer technology at the moment seem to be driven by the games market and the Internet, so the future of e-paper will be determined by market forces.

Work is already in progress to produce a pencil-sized "magic wand" that when swept across a page of e-paper will place there digital information downloaded to it from a computer. So when we call at the newsagents for our daily paper perhaps he will sell us a throwaway pencil-sized version. Certainly fish-and-chips won't have the same taste wrapped in e-paper!

This Issue's Textface

We have used Baskerville – Deke McClelland in his latest book, "Adobe InDesign for Dummies" says that Baskerville is the typeface that should be on every computer instead of Times. John Baskerville of Birmingham designed it in 1754. It imparts an elegant and distinctive look without distracting readers.

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Real Virtuality

by Rob Staerck

Twenty years ago, when the concept of IT as a universal tool for more effective learning first started to appear as a real possibility, people began to extrapolate to form views of the future. Not an easy task was this extrapolation, for in those days there were negligible (though non-zero) provision and negligible (though non-zero) usage - but such attempts appeared, including in the pages of Education Equipment; this is not the place to run through the results of those musings, except for one case. That case was the vision of IT's becoming the medium through which the Marxist dream of de-schooling could take place. In this vision, schools would disappear as centres for more than social interaction; education would be delivered in the learners' homes, or in very local sub-street-level resource centres, with a computer for each individual linked to large-scale, maybe very distant, centres of teaching excellence. IT-based distance learning on this model would have a number of significant advantages. The list is much like that given for tele-working (where information workers at least work from home rather than from large costly offices) - various economies, as of fewer large inefficiently used buildings, mass transit systems and delivery workers (teachers and support staff in our case); less opportunity for people to gather and cause trouble for the Establishment (for instance asking for better conditions); more freedom of choice for the learners (in our case) to decide when and how they learn. Such nostalgia for past dreams of distant futures is triggered by hearing of a friend's recently observing an A-level Electronics lesson delivered by a system much like this. There are two young men in the 'class' in a rural school in England; for an hour each week they are on-line to a tutor in Wales using a simple PC-based video-camera link. During this time, they receive an almost Oxford-style tutorial as they carry out complex experiments using a kit, discuss their 'home' work exercises (earlier sent to the tutor by email) and their reading, and develop their understanding of the subject in theory and in practice. The two learners have no problem with this; they see it as far better than travelling for a couple of hours or more several days a week to the nearest place - perhaps a seemingly anonymous college - that offers face-to-face teaching. The school has no problem with it: the students remain on their roll yet make efficiently few demands on costly resources. The tutor and the tutor's institutions are happy too: there's more money for them without great resource demands, and possibly more higher education students later. Our friend had two concerns, however. First, the tutor has a large number of such tiny groups of students: it would be more efficient and more effective to work with sets of tiny groups at the same time (the technology can cope). Second, the observation was during an Ofsted inspection of the school - and current inspection systems can't readily deal with such situations. Will that latter be the reason for such invaluable explorations to cease?

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Shoptalk

by David Palmer

DON'T SHOUT AT ME

I have had big problems with my linux webserver. I wanted to move some of the sets of pages we have on our intranet across to it. This appears to be simple because I can use Windows Explorer and drag and drop to move the files around the network neighbourhood. Some of our machines can see our old server, our new server and the webserver, All seemed fine until I tried to browse the pages. The links from the contents page to the subsets worked fine but the links from page to page didn't. After a lot of huffing and puffing (and one or two rude words) I spotted the case in the error message saying page not found. I looked again at the pages with Explorer and saw they all had an initial uppercase letter. I went through and changed the links to indicate this - which took a fair while - only to find that this did not solve the problem. Eventually (by sheer fluke) I found that the DOS filename for each page was ALL uppercase! I was only able to see this by rt-clicking a file and going to properties. I don't know how/when this happened but now face the task of changing all the links again . .

IMPRESSED?

We had an Open Morning last Saturday and I was very pleased when two parents told me that (a) they had 'found' our school on the internet and (b) they had filled in the form there that you can use to request more data - and they'd got the prospectus in the post the next day!! I said I could hardly believe it - especially since all these forms come through me! They went on to say that they had been to loads of sites of all kinds and filled in many of these form and mostly been ignored! I then blew all my good work by saying "Don't get me started, I might just tell you about what happened to me on the BT site . . . " only for her to cut me off "My husband works for BT . . ." as he stalked off and she followed.

CHEEP, CHEEP

I don't know about you but I tend to buy cheap. I have been buying some very nice "only-one-careful-owner PII 200Mhz machines recently for about £300 for a complete system. I buy bits from CPC and I have been buying ink from Action - but just the other day I tried Quill - and they were cheaper and quicker - and sent me a goody bag!!

LOST

I thought I had lost my sense of humour! I was horrified to find a grumpy old teacher staring out of the passport photos I had done the other day. However, I was taking our tinies the other day and, to my amazement, I had a laugh.

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FAREWELL TO RM USER

WE have avidly looked forward to each issue of the magazine. Sometimes we had to look forward for quite some time, as publication dates have always been flexible!

The magazine has always discussed computing issues of the day and reflected the interests of the editor, especially on a quarter that was short of news, as many an editor produced several articles to fill the pages.

In the good old days the Journal, as it was known, was A4 in size and contained many listings, all in matrix dot typeface. These programs could be really useful, printer routines for use with BASIC or TXED, and were avidly copied so that handouts could be written with centred, bold and enlarged type. This was so long ago that the handouts were printed on Banda masters - who remembers them!

The page of items for sale was always worth reading, mainly for an insight into what other members were doing, except for the times when we had gear to be disposed of. The ads certainly worked, as a number of minibus trips with 480Zs and their huge servers are still remembered vividly. In 1993 or 4 we even supplied a 380Z with twin five and a quarter drives to a company that was still running its custom-written accounting system on one. They had been devastated to find that not only could no-one at RM fix it, but they couldn't find anyone who ever worked on one.

At times RM User was accused of being too technical, all "FF00"s as one correspondent put it. John has to accept some blame in this direction, as, encouraged by Editor (and fellow NetLM pioneer) Steve Rochford, he produced batch files and MTSL scripts to do things that any sensible person would leave alone until Microsoft or RM got round to producing an official solution.

Ah well, we'll just have to wait for 'Computer Shopper' to drop on the mat so we can fight to see who reads it first!

Helen and John Williams

November 1999

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